



FAIRLEE NEWSLETTER

February 2023
Things you should know about Fairlee's budget before Town Meeting

LAKE MOREY NEWS FLASH

To address Lake Morey's cyanobacteria outbreak, SOLITUDE Lake Management recommends an alum treatment to contain phosphorous and enhance water clarity. The recommended dosage is 20% less than the dosage in Lake Morey's 1986 treatment. A very preliminary cost estimate for the service is +/- \$740,000. Next step is an important meeting with the Agency of Natural Resources on February 14th to confirm next steps, learn about state and federal funding, and discuss the information required for a permit. In the '80s, it took five years to move from feasibility study to alum application. Today, Fairlee and the ANR are working at warp speed—key process steps are taken in a matter of days and weeks rather than years. Our objective is to schedule the alum treatment as soon as possible.

TOWN BUDGET

The budget public hearing on Monday, January 9th was attended by nearly 60 residents. The Budget Committee (Elizabeth Wilson, Dan Ludwig, and Richard Kenney) sought input about a draft budget with an 11.89% increase over last year. In response to the suggestions received from the community and the Budget Committee, the Selectboard made the following decisions about the Town Budget that will be voted upon at Town Meeting.

- Eliminated expanded hours at the Transfer Stations
- Retained 7.4% cost of living allowance for all Town employees
- Level funded Emergency Equipment, Town Highway, and Lake reserves in the capital budget
- Confirmed 30-hour per week local police coverage
- Cut funding for 4th of July fireworks

The budget that will be set before Fairlee on Town Meeting Day has a 9.67% increase over last year and an estimated tax rate of \$0.6848.

Year	Tax Rate	% Tax Rate Growth	Cash Carried Forward
2016	0.5350	9.9%	\$63,344
2017	0.5313	-0.7%	\$73,159
2018	0.5613	5.6%	\$31,492
2019	0.5817	3.6%	\$13,000
2020	0.5991	3.0%	\$0
2021	0.5975	-0.3%	\$25,000
2022	0.6244	4.9%	\$69,000
2023	0.6848 est.	9.67%	\$52,500

ELIMINATE EXPANDED HOURS

The Selectboard initially proposed having the Transfer Station open an additional 3 hours each week, adding \$4,577 to the municipal budget, which would have led to an increase of 0.4% over last year's tax rate and added \$6.87 to the tax bill on a \$250,000 home. The Budget Committee and residents at the Public Hearing asked the Selectboard to eliminate the proposed additional hours in 2023.

RETAIN COLA FOR TOWN STAFF

The Selectboard is committed to retaining Fairlee's superior elected and appointed Town staff. **It is far less expensive to retain good staff than to search, recruit and hire new staff.** Considering inflation, the Selectboard feels strongly that the 7.4% cost of living adjustment (COLA) is appropriate. Increasing from last year's 5.7% COLA to this next year's 7.4% COLA adds \$28,482 to the municipal budget leading to an increase of less than 1% over last year's tax rate and an increase of \$38 on the tax bill for a \$250,000 home.

**TOWN MEETING 2023
WILL BE IN-PERSON**

There is NO Australian Ballot voting
Tuesday, March 7
10 AM—Town Hall Auditorium

YOU MUST BE PRESENT TO VOTE

LEVEL FUND THREE CAPITAL RESERVES

Fairlee's capital budget has four reserve funds: Town Buildings and Lands, Emergency Equipment, Town Highway, and Lake. The reserves are similar to savings accounts and prepare the Town to fund important expenditures of \$10,000 or more, including paying down debt.

Each year, the Town adds funds and subtracts expenditures from the reserves. For example, the Town strategically invested \$227,573 in 2021 and \$267,073 in 2022 in preparation for foreseeable capital expenditures.

Initially planning to invest over \$300,000 in 2023, the Selectboard decided to level fund its investments in the Emergency Equipment, the Town Highway, and the Lake reserves, nullifying a potential increase of 1.7% over last year's tax rate and saving approximately \$30 on the tax bill for a \$250,000 home.

ARTICLE 8:	<u>Act. 2020</u>	<u>Act. 2021</u>	<u>Act. 2022</u>	<u>Est. 2023</u>
Town Buildings & Land Reserve	40,000	35,000	32,000	40,000
Debt Service - Town Hall Loan	56,573	56,573	56,573	56,573
			88,573	96,573
Emergency Equipment Reserve	10,000	18,000	20,000	20,000
Town Highway Reserve	90,000	90,000	130,000	130,000
Lake Reserve	7,500	7,000	7,500	7,500
Debt Service - Lake Fairlee Dam Loan	21,000	21,000	21,000	21,000
			28,500	28,500
Capital Budget to be Raised by Taxes	225,073	227,573	267,073	275,073

The funds added in 2023 will mean that Fairlee has over \$200,000 in the Emergency Equipment reserve. Two Emergency Equipment expenditures caught the attention of the Budget Committee and members of the community: a fire engine and a utility terrain vehicle.

Fairlee’s primary fire engine has reached its retirement age. When a new truck is ordered, delivery is typically 18 to 24 months later. The current price tag for a new vehicle is approximately \$500,000, making it essential that Fairlee borrow and compete for grants, particularly ones from FEMA. The Selectboard plans for a separate Australian ballot vote on fire truck borrowing in the spring.

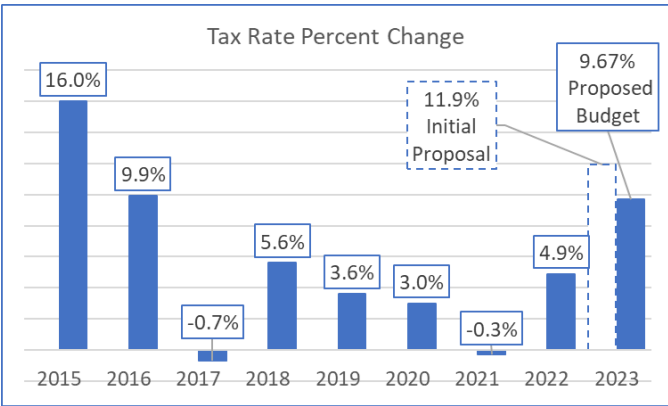
The UTV sought by the Fire Department and the Fast Squad (and its added, required safety equipment) would be useful on ice, in wilderness areas, on rugged roads, and on steep embankments. With major events, the Town can rely on the Upper Valley Search and Rescue based at Dartmouth Hitchcock, yet smaller problematic events, such as ice fishing or skating accidents or a steep icy driveway that is inaccessible by Upper Valley Ambulance, call for a more rapid and safe UTV response. The Selectboard proposes to retain an expense of \$15,000 in the Emergency Equipment Reserve upon agreement that the remainder of the total estimated \$30,000 expense would be funded by a FEMA grant.

ENSURE LOCAL POLICE COVERAGE

Jason Bachus, who has worked 10 hours per week as Fairlee’s Police Chief while also serving as a fulltime officer in Orford, plans to resign from the Fairlee position on March 1, 2023. After exploring all available sources of coverage, Chief Bachus proposed that Fairlee hire a 30-hour per week officer. The Selectboard is committed to public safety and has budgeted \$54,600 for such an officer. With a significant reduction in Orange County Sheriff’s Department

subcontracting, there will be only an \$1,879 increase (2.5%) over last year’s police budget.

CUT FUNDING FOR 4th OF JULY FIREWORKS
Fairlee originally budgeted \$8,000 as a partial payment towards the minimum \$12,000 quote for 4th of July fireworks. Based on what it heard from the Budget Committee and the community, the Selectboard made the tough choice to cut its partial funding, eliminating an increase of 0.6% over last year’s tax rate and saving approximately \$11 on the tax bill for a \$250,000 home.



The Selectboard believes that the proposed budget supports the values of the Fairlee community and is fiscally responsible. **We hope that you will support the proposed 2023 municipal budget.**

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